

Date: Fri, 20 Oct 2000 17:32:19 -0700
To: Harold Varmus <varmus@mskcc.org>
From: "Patrick O. Brown" <pbrown@cmgm.stanford.edu>
Subject: Re: Confidential

My inclination is to start soon. I think that the list as it already stands gives a pretty good feeling of the extent of support in those institutions where the letter has actually circulated.

I'd favor starting with just a few journals and talking with them one on one. Definitely not at a meeting of publishers, where there will be a strong "us vs. them" atmosphere. The one on one format will be much more focused and constructive, I'm sure. My inclination would be to talk to:

Science (Don Kennedy first)

Cold Spring Harbor Press (John Ingalls)

ASM

APS

maybe Oxford University Press (I think they publish NAR, so we would have a foot in the door).

Obviously I favor going to the strong journals first. They are more likely to be confident that they can retain their constituents on the basis of the value of the fresh material for which subscribers would still want to pay, even if the archival volumes were free. And once we have a few of the top journals on our side, it will be much easier to get people to sign the open letter, and much easier to persuade other journals to do the same (or risk being marginalized). Doing it weak journals first will reinforce the fear that supporters would be relegating their papers to second-rate journals.

I don't think Cell Press is critical. The stature of a journal is determined by quality of the work that is submitted to it. If we get Science and a few of the top society publishers on our side, I think we will see a lot of reticent supporters sign on, and Cell will immediately face a perceptible drop in their stature - the very fact that we can get so many top scientists to sign even without a "Science" on our list, and certainly without any strong expectation that Cell will ever be on it, is a powerful statement about how dispensible Cell is. (In fact, I don't think they would want to see that go much further, and so, I wouldn't be surprised agreed to our policy relatively quickly once they see which way the wind is blowing). But I think the right attitude for us to take is "who needs Cell? They should do the right thing, but if they don't, it's their loss"

Perhaps if Science signs on, we could persuade them to set up a Cell-like journal to provide a "prestigious" imprint to publish Cell-format- and-stature papers - (wide audience, hot, too long for Science).

Anyway, I don't think we should agonize over Cell.

Let me know when you might want to talk to plan our strategy for approaching the publishers, and also maybe to talk a bit about fund raising for the library consortium - I think our success with the open letter might help our credibility in raising funds for the library project, though getting the journals to sign on is obviously the sine qua non.

Pat

PS: David B = David Baltimore? He would be a great ally in approaching publishers.

Do you have further ideas about approaching publishers? David B. asked about this too (see message pasted below). My sense is that we should have a long list of pledged individuals before opening the conversation. But do we start with individual journals or a meeting of publishers? with the weak or the strong journals? with those electronically inclined or the retrogrades?

Harold-- This is certainly a direct approach to the problem and with enough signatories could be quite effective. I will sign on. However, I think it is necessary to have some idea of the publishers' response to this and what journals will be available for publishing. Cell Press is critical and now that it is no longer independent it will be a tough one (would have been before too, I suspect). Has there been any negotiation with the publishers? David

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